INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD RELIGION
LESSON 3A

D. Prominent features of a Mystery Religion

1. A Mystery Religion was a religion of symbolism

a. Through the use of myth and allegory, iconic representations, blazing lights and dense darkness, liturgies and sacramental acts, as well as suggestion, the intuitions of the heart of the initiate were quickened until s/he was provoked into a mystical experience.

(1) This experience led to a feeling of regeneration, which was the object of every initiation.

2. A Mystery Religion was a religion of Redemption.

a. It professed to remove the estrangement between man and God, to procure forgiveness of sins, and to furnish mediation.

(1) Means of purification and the formulae of access to the God, and acclamations of confidence and victory were part of the apparatus of every Mystery.

3. The Mystery Religions were systems of Gnosis.

a. The Mysteries brought men into contact with that God "who wishes to be known and is known to his own."

(1) They offered an esoteric equipment by which the initiate might ward off the attacks of demons, thwart the menace of Fate, and after death reach the abodes of the blessed mysteries.

(a) There was something, whether doctrine, symbol, or divine drama, which could not be imparted except by initiation to those duly qualified to receive it, a supernatural revelation which gave the recipient a new outlook on life, the world and the deity, and security that was denied to the uninitiated.

(b) The 'mystery' consisted of an objective presentation of the history of the cult Deity, in his or her struggles, sorrows, and triumphs, repeated subjectively by the initiate in sacramental acts, together with prayers and liturgic formulae.

4. A Mystery Religion was a Sacramental Drama.

a. The Sacramental Drama appealing primarily to the emotions, aimed at producing psychic and mystic effects. Thus the neophyte experienced the exaltation of a new life.

5. The mysteries were eschatological religions, having to do with the interests and issues of life and death.

a. For the multitudes, it was the mysteries which illuminated the hereafter.

6. A mystery religion was a personal religion, to which membership was open, not by accident of birth into any particular class, but by a religious rebirth.

7. A mystery religion, as a personal religion, presents another side, which is the necessary compliment of an individualistic religion; that is, it takes on the character of a cosmic religion.

a. The ancients lived in a world in which the primitive association of man's life with the earth and plant and animal life was axiomatic, in which the Universe itself was a rational living being, in which man by his good deeds might be elevated on the path of the divine.

I. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE MAJOR MYSTERY RELIGIONS

A. Fundamental Force Behind Development

1. Once, there was no purely 'native' or 'hermetic' tradition; only a universal response by the Firstborn to the Earth-lore and the Star-magic of their shamanic priests.

a. Later, as the single religious impulse of the Foretime split into separate cults, these two approaches, which we may think of as earthly (or chthonic) and stellar, grew further apart, until the beginnings of the Hermetic traditions were seeded in Egypt and the Hellenic world, while in Europe the Native traditions remained more or less grounded in the magic of the earth.

(1) This is not to say that Greece and Egypt did not have their own native traditions, or that development of religion and magic in the Celtic West was so primitive and slow that it required cross-fertilization with other sources to pull it into subtle realms of experience.

B. The Major Mystery Religions.

1. It has often been said the the Egyptian mysteries are the true foundation upon which the Western Hermetic systems are built.

a. This is due in part to the early identification of the Egyptian God Thoth, scribe and guardian of mysteries, with Hermes Trimegistos, the supposed founder of Western occult practice.

(1) Egypt had many mysteries, none more important that those of Isis.

(a) Her name is said to mean 'throne', 'wisdom', or 'savior', though she possessed many other titles which testify to the universality of her cult.

(2) The deepest mysteries of Isis, and her consort- brother Osiris, the God of the Sun, revolve around his death at the hands of his brother Set, who cut Osiris' body into 14 parts and scattered them through the world.

(a) Isis undertook a terrible journey, suffering great hardship, seeking out the broken body of her lord and reassembling the parts.

[1] She found and reassembled all but one part, the phallus, which was thrown into the Nile and consumed by a fish.

b. Despite this, such was the creative power of Isis that she was able to conceive by means of an artificial phallus, and bore the child Horus who avenged his father by killing Set.

(1) This is an archetypical mystery-telling, introducing themes found later in the teachings of the Hellenistic schools and in the work of modern esoteric orders.

(a) It prefigures the death and rising of many gods and show forth the power of the Creative Principle.

(b) It also establishes Isis as Queen of Heaven, more powerful in the eyes of many than even the great god Ra himself, whose representative upon earth was the Pharaoh.

3. In Mithraism, which descended from the Persian Mysteries, Mithra stands as a mediator between light and dark, a position adopted by his followers.

a. In humanity, the battle for the soul is fought out in the territory of the flesh. Mithra, entering there, keeps all in balance.

(1) Mithraism was the Freemasonry of the Roman world.

(a) Like the other cults of Oriental origin, it moved with the vast commerce in human beings that was such a notable feature of the ancient world.

(b) The cult of Mithra is one that traveled well, from Syria to Scotland.

(c) The Mithraic community was all men: women gravitated to the parallel cult of Cybele or the exclusively female one of Bona Dea.

(d) The congregations were small; no surviving Mithraeum could house more than a hundred, but of course bigger lodges may have formed, and dissolved, at army camps, because Mithraism was extremely popular among the Roman Legions.

(e) There were no social barriers, so that slaves and privates could become high initiates. The ceremonies were solemnly

enacted and the initiations were quite awe-inspiring.

b. Mithra was born on the 25th of December, called the "Birthday of the Unconquered Sun."

(1) This date was not taken over by the Christians for the birth of their Savior until the 4th century BCE.

c. Some said that Mithra sprang from the union of sun god and his own mother.

(1) Some claimed his mother to be a mortal virgin.

(a) Others said Mithra had no mother, but was miraculously born of a female Rock, the petra genetrix, fertilized by the Heavenly Father's phallic lightning.

2. In the many histories of the ancient world, only one figure is described as being of greater importance than Hermes. This is the Persian mage Zoroaster, who may actually have lived around 1000 BCE., or even earlier, but who clearly did not predate the foundation of the Egyptian mysteries from which he drew heavily for his own system.

a. It is from the Persian mysteries that we derive the dualistic spectre which has haunted esoteric philosophy and teaching ever since.

(1) In the Zoroastrian pantheon these opposing forces are Ormuzd and Ahriman, who derive ultimately from Ahura Mazda, the divine principle.

(a) Known as the Holy Immortals, or Amesha Spentas, they correspond to the levels of creation, clearly foreshadowing the teaching of later mystery schools such as those of Orpheus and Mithra.

(b) Against the Spentas are arrayed the Devas, the companions of the Evil One, who are seen as ruling over the earth.

[1] The position of Persian dualism is confused by a Zoroastrian heresy called Zurvanism, which is often mistaken for mainstream Zoroastrianism.

[a] In Zoroastrianism proper, Ahura Mazda is supremely god: his Spentas are not on the same footing.

[b] In Zurvanism, however, Ahura Mazda is made into a lesser creator or demiurge, hence the cosmic struggle of good against evil which takes place in the world of matter.

(2) In Zoroastrian teaching, a savior or saoshyant was to be born, who would combat evil and bring the struggle to an end once and for all, thus betokening the Frasokereti, the making perfect at the end of time.

(a) In this we see an echo of the Egyptian mysteries, and a

prefiguring of the gnostic position, as well as the appearance of a third figure which becomes a requirement of all dualistic thinking sooner or later. This third figure who will balance out the struggle is a Messiah.

(b) Mithra's birth was witnessed by shepherd and Magi, who brought gifts to his sacred birth-cave of the Rock.

d. Mithra performed the usual assortment of miracles - raising the dead, healing the sick, making the blind to see and the lame to walk, casting out devils.

(1) As a 'Peter', son of petra, he carried the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

e. His triumph and ascension to heaven were celebrated at the spring equinox, when the sun rises toward its apogee.

(1) Before returning to heaven, Mithra celebrated a Last Supper with his 12 disciples, who represented the signs of the zodiac.

(a) In memory of this, his worshippers partook of a sacramental bread marked with a cross.

[1] This was one of the seven Mithraic sacraments. It was called mizd, in latin-missa, in english- mass.

(2) Mithra's image was buried in a rock tomb, the same sacred cave that represented his Mothers' womb.

(a) His image was later withdrawn from the cave and was said to live again.

f. What began in water would end in fire, according to Mithraic beliefs.

(1) The great battle between the forces of light and darkness in the Last Days would destroy the earth with its upheavals and burnings.

(a) Virtuous ones who followed the teachings of the Mithraic priesthood would join the spirits of light and be saved.

(b) Sinful ones who followed other teachings would be cast into hell with Ahriman and the fallen angels.

g. Mithra's cave-temple on the Vatican Hill was seized by the Christians in 376 CE.

(1) Christian Bishops of Rome pre-empted the Mithraic high priest's title of Pater Patrum, which became Papa, or Pope.

4. While the Mithraic mysteries succeeded those of Zoroaster, they followed those of Dionysus, through which the core of Hellenic mystery

teaching found its way into the Western Mystery Tradition.

a. Two streams of consciousness are discerable within the Classical mysteries, which might be called Dionysian and Apollonian.

(1) The Apollonian mysteries related to reason, to the heavens and to order; this is in contradistinction to the chaotic mysteries of Dionysus.

(a) The priests of Apollo were more interested in wresting the political power away from the earlier Goddess worshipping peoples who held sway as the Oracle at Delphi, and so their mysteries were not so widely spread because they were tied to a specific location and shrine.

(2) The Mysteries of Dionysus were those of the sacrificial king: they pertain to the underworld side of things, the chthonic and ecstatic cult of maenads and bacchantes.

(a) Of all the mystery Gods, it is Dionysus whose character has become most firmly fixed in the collective imagination. His worship spells orgies and drunkenness; he personifies the irrational and uncontrolable urges of mankind and beasts; he drives to frenzy the maenads and the poets.

[1] The myth of Dionysus' origins tells that he was first born from the union of Zeus with Persephone.

[a] Zeus designated this 'Zagreus' as his heir, but the jealous Titans lured him away while he was yet a child, killed, dismembered him and devoured all the pieces except for the heart, which Athena rescued and preserved.

[b] Zeus, in anger, reduced the Titans to ashes, from which the new race of humanity was fashioned. Thus each person contains a fragment of Dionysus within their 'Titanic' earthly body.

[c] From the heart of the god was brewed a love-potion, which was given to Semele, a mortal, who then forced her lover -Zeus again- into revealing himself to her in his primal form. This unveiling was so overwhelming as to annihilate her, but the child she was carrying was saved by Zeus enclosing it in his loins until the time came for its birth as the second Dionysus.

[2] The young god grew up in Thrace, suckled by goats and raised by satyrs and sileni. When he reached maturity, he descended through the Alcyonian Lake to rescue the shade of his mother Semele from Hades and then raised her to Olympus.

[a] Afterward, accompanied by a motley train of semi-human beings, maenads and panthers, he set off on wanderings throughout the world, from Libya to Arabia to India and thus back to his homeland.

[3] Everywhere he went he brought humanity knowledge of agriculture, arts and crafts, and most especially the cultivation of the vine and wine-making.

[a] On the Isle of Naxos he discovered the Cretan Princess Ariadne, abandoned there by Theseus, and joined with her as her husband. Together they ascended to the heavens, whence he offers a similar blissful reward to his devotees, temporarily in this life and permanently after death.

5. There had been an initiatic institution in Greece at Eleusis at least since the 8th century BCE, with both Greater and Lesser Mysteries.

a. The function of all lesser mysteries, and equally of the lower grades of initiation was to impart information on the nature of higher worlds.

(1) The Eleusinian symbolism of corn, pomegranites and poppies refers to the unseen forces which affect humanity via the vegetable kingdom, building the body and informing the mind.

(a) The intuitive grasp of this relationship, in all its wonder and complexity, was summarized in the famous climax od the Mystery, so disappointing to non-initiates, the displaying of an ear of wheat.

(2) Certain information was also given at Eleusis by word of mouth, including the 'password to the Paradise of Demeter' to be used after death.

(a) In the Lesser Mysteries of other gods, it is suggested that the fact of heliocentricity was revealed.

[1] Jewish esotericism includes the teaching of reincarnation.

[a] So Lesser Mysteries give the initiates theoretical knowledge which changes their whole view of humanity and the cosmos, and stands them in better stead when they have to leave this world for the unknown.

b. The Mysteries of Demeter were celebrated every five years at Eleusis.

(1) The candidate of the Lesser Mysteries underwent a symbolic journey in which the quest of Demeter for her lost daughter Persephone in Hades was reenacted with the would-be candidate in the role of Demeter.

(a) The journey within was that of the darkened soul: the candidate passed through a door into total darkness: if they survived the experiences met within they passed through a second door into brilliant light - symbolizing rebirth into the heavenly sphere. Here

they actually meet the gods, experiencing Demeter's journey as their own recovery of lost enlightenment.

c. The function of the Greater Mysteries of Eleusis was to bring about direct contact with the beings who inhabit the higher worlds.

(1) The higher grades of initiation were conducted individually rather than collectively as in the Lesser Mysteries.

(a) The Initiation of Isis were given to those selected by the Goddess through having had significant dreams, whether they were laity, priests or priestesses.

(b) In the inner truth of the Eleusinian mysteries, the birth of the soul into matter is seen as death; only through participation in the mysteries can the initiate rise to a timeless reality where he is utterly free and alive.

[1] The soul sleeps in the body for most of the time, awakening only when it has been transformed by ritual and the use of an initiatory drink.

[a] To die without this experience is to sleep forever or to wander houseless in the caverns of Hades.

(2) The primary objective in these initiations was to take the candidate through the gates of death.

(a) As in shamanic, Masonic, and other later initiations, the candidate was placed in a trance, the consciousness taken out of the body, and in this state to experience higher states of being and meet some of the denizens of the invisible worlds.

[1] Through direct experience the candidates would learn that they could live freely without their physical bodies, and that the gods they worshipped were perfectly real.

[a] Then they would return to earth fully convinced of their own immortality and prepared to meet death fearlessly, knowing it is the gate to freedom and the soul's true home.

6. As a descendant of Dionysus, Orpheus is the intellectual image of a demi-god, raised to deity by his sufferings in the underworld: a perfect symbol for all who follow the paths of the mysteries.

a. The movement from the cult of Dionysus and Apollo to Orphism, marks a change from a more primitive religious response towards an ethically-based philosophy and mysticism which included belief in the transmigration of souls, reincarnation and the final assumption into godhead.

(1) Orpheus has the lyre and the gift of music from Apollo, yet ends like Dionysus, torn apart by Thracian bacchantes.

(a) The shamanic practices of the Native Tradition overlapping the priestly function of the mystery school.

[1] The suffering of Orpheus, who loses Euridice (through fear, the first pitfall of all mystery knowledge) and is then dismembered by the Maenads, is a paradigm of the suffering and rebirth of the sleeping soul.

b. The Orphic mysteries are complex in the extreme.

(1) The most important aspect of the Orphic Mysteries was that humanity and the gods are related.

(a) At a most subtle and sensitive level a blurring of the edges occurs, an overlapping of human consciousness and divine awareness.

[1] "Everything that lives is Holy" becomes a reality in the interaction of the divine and the mundane.

(2) The hierarchy of spiritual creation is supremely complex, but the gods are like a ladder, a system of related possibilities, the potentiality of which is seeded within the whole of creation.

(a) We are all related, not just in a familial sense but also to everything else: earth and water, sky and stone; not only because all of creation is made up of different combinations of molecules, but because we are all a part of the divine hierarchy.

[1] This is the true meaning of the mystery teaching concerning the divine spark; the god like potential of humanity is far better expressed by this means.

[a] The divine fragment is that part of us which is always seeking reunion, a reassembly of separated parts into the whole from which they were created; a return to the paradisial state.

c. The Orphic school was, above all, syncretic.

(1) Orpheus is credited with the dissemination of the mysteries, with passing on rather than inventing much that became the basis of subsequent Greco-Roman theosophy.

(a) Pythagoras followed many of the Orphic teachings and made Orpheus the central deity of his own esoteric system, establishing a canon of Orphic Hyms.

(2) Between the Orphic mysteries and their partial revival in the Rennaisance, there is a long gap not only in time but in understanding.

III CHRISTIANITY VIEWED AS A MYSTERY RELIGION

A. The Foundation of Christianity

1. Most people think of Christianity as if it were a single specific thing, a coherent, homogeneous, and unified entity.

a. Christianity is nothing of the sort.

(1) There are numerous forms of Christianity

(a) Roman Catholic

(b) Russian Orthodox

(c) Greek Orthodox

(d) Church of England (Anglican), formed by King Henry the VIII

(e) Various other forms of Protestantism

[1] From the original Lutheranism and Calvinism of the 16th century to such relatively recent developments as Unitarianism.

(f) There are multitudinous "fringe" or "evangelical" congregations.

[1] Such as the Seventh Day Adventists, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Assembly of God.

(g) And there are assorted contemporary sects and cults.

[1] Like the Children of God and the Unification Church of Reverend Moon.

b. If one surveys this bewildering spectrum of beliefs - from the rigidly dogmatic and conservative to the radical and ecstatic- it is difficult to determine what exactly constitutes Christianity.

2. If there is a single factor that does permit one to speak of Christianity, a single factor that does link the otherwise diverse and divergent Christian creeds, it is the New Testament and more particularly the unique status ascribed by the New Testament to Jesus, his Crucifixion and Resurrection.

a. Even if one does not subscribe to the literal or historical truth of those events, acceptance of their symbolic significance generally suffices for one to be considered a christian.

3. If there is any unity then, in the diffuse phenomenon called Christianity, it resides in the New Testament - and more specifically, in the accounts of Jesus known as the four Gospels.

a. These accounts are popularly regarded as the most authoritative on record.

(1) And for many Christians they are assumed to be both

coherent and unimpeachable.

b. From childhood one is led to believe that the story of Jesus, as it is preserved in the Four Gospels, is if not God-inspired, at least definitive.

(1) The Four Evangelists, supposed authors of the Gospels, are deemed to be unimpeachable witnesses who consistantly reinforce and confirm each other's testimony.

c. Of the people who today call themselves Christians, relatively few are aware of the fact that the four Gospels not only contradict each other in more than one way, but at times they violently disagree.

B. The Origin and Birth of Jesus

1. So far as popular tradition is concerned, the origin and birth of Jesus are well enough known.

a. In reality, the Gospels, on which that tradition is based, are considerably more vague on the matter.

(1) Only two of the Gospels - Matthew and Luke - say anything at all about Jesus' origins and birth; and they are flagrantly at odds with each other.

(a) According to Matthew, Jesus was an aristocrat, if not a rightful and legitimate king - descended from David via Solomon.

(b) According to Luke, on the other hand, Jesus' family, though descended from the house of David, was of somewhat less exalted stock.

(c) And it is on the basis of Mark's account that the legend of the "poor carpenter" came into being.

(2) In short, the two genealogies are so strikingly discordant that they might well be referring to quite different individuals.

2. The discrepencies between the Gospels are not confined to the question of Jesus' ancestry and genealogy.

a. According to Luke, Jesus, on his birth, was visited by shepherds.

(1) But according to Matthew, he was visited by kings, the Magi.

b. According to Luke, Jesus' family lived in Nazareth.

(1) From here they are said to have journeyed, for a census (that history suggests never in fact occurred) to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born in the poverty of a manger.

c. But according to Matthew, his family had been fairly well to do residents of Bethlehem all along, and Jesus himself was born in a house.

(1) In Matthew's version Herod's persecution of the innocents prompts the family to flee into Egypt, and only on their return do they make their home in Nazareth.

3. The information in each of these accounts is quite specific and - assuming the census did occur - perfectly plausible.

a. And yet, the information itself simply does not agree. The contradiction cannot be rationalized.

(1) There is no possible means whereby the two conflicting narratives can both be correct, and there is no means whereby they can be reconciled.

(a) Whether one cares to admit it or not, the fact must be recognized that one or both of the Gospels are wrong.

[1] In the face of so glaring and inevitable a conclusion, the Gospels cannot be regarded as unimpunable.

[a] How can they be unimpunable- when they are inconsistent with each other?

4. The more one studies the Gospels, the more the contradictions between them become apparent.

a. They can not even agree on which day the Crucifixion took place.

(1) According to John, the Crucifixion occurred on the day before the Passover.

(a) Whereas, Mark, Luke, and Matthew insist that it occurred on the day after.

b. Nor are the Gospels in accord on the personality and character of Jesus.

(1) Each depicts a figure who is patently at odds with the figure depicted by the others.

(a) A meek, lamblike Savior in Luke.

(b) A powerful and majestic sovereign in Matthew who comes "not to bring peace but a sword."

c. There is further disagreement about Jesus' last words on the cross.

(1) In Matthew and Mark the words are, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

(2) In Luke, the words are-"Father, into they hands I commend my spirit."

(3) And in John they are simply "It is finished."

5. With these discrepancies, they can only be accepted as highly questionable, and certainly not as definitive.

a. They do not represent the perfect word of ANY God; or if they do, God's words have been VERY liberally edited, censored, revised, glossed and rewritten by human hands.

C. Jesus and the Essenes

1. As we have seen, the Judaic religion was still a tribal religion offering little chance for individual salvation during a time when people were looking for some assurance that they mattered beyond which tribe, or city or province they came from.

a. Mystery religions were well established in the east and making inroads into Rome herself.

(1) In addition to the Pharisees and Sadducees who were vying for control of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' life, there was a sect of ascetics known as the Essenes.

(a) It has been said that the Essenes were the founders of a Mystery religion based along the lines of the sun worshipping Persian anchorites, who in turn evolved their system from Jain yogis professing to work miracles by living apart from the world and practicing extreme self denial.

[1] From historians and chroniclers writing at the time, it is known that the Essenes maintained communities throughout the Holy Land.

[a] A large colony of Essenes occupied the Qumran community from 110 BCE to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, with a significant period of vacancy during the reign of Herod, 31 BCE - 4 CE.

2. Jesus, John the Baptist, and Simon Magus are said to have been trained in Essenic communities.

a. Jesus' parents, Joseph and Mary, are also said to belong to the Essenic movement and Jesus may have received his rabbinical training in their schools.

(1) John the Baptist is thought by some to have been an 'advance man' to prepare the way for Jesus to fulfill the old prophecies of being the Messiah.

(a) But there is abundant evidence that Jesus not only knew what the prophecies were concerning the Messiah, but went to great lengths to plan for and carry out the prophecies.

3. The Essenic hierarchy included a chief priest called the Christos (Annointed One), "head of the entire Congre- gation of Israel."

a. There were ordinary priests called the "sons of Aaron", and another functionary known as the Messiah of Israel.

(1) The Messiah of Israel was also called Teacher of Righteousness.

(a) He suffered physical abuse in atonement for the sins of the entire community, enduring "vindictive sentences of scourging and the terrors of painful sicknesses, and vengeance on his fleshly body."

D. A Radical View

1. The following is a scenario of what the historical Jesus might have been all about based on looking at the Gospels without the trappings added after Christianity was transported to Rome and changed to bring it into alignment with competing religions.

EDITORS NOTE: THESE ARE CONJECTURE BY THE AUTHOR, NOT A STATEMENT OF KNOWN FACT BUT BASED ON THE FACTS KNOWN AND THE HISTORY OF THE TIMES AND OTHER RELIGIONS.

a. Included in this scenario, but of little importance to our discussion, is that Jesus may have been married and have living descendants to this day. Remember that Rabbis had always been allowed to marry.

(1) Jesus was a priest-king, an aristocrat and legitimate claimant to the throne of Palestine, who embarked on an attempt to regain his rightful heritage.

(a) He was believed to be a native of Galilee, which was a traditional hotbed of opposition to the Romans.

(2) He had numerous noble, rich and influential supporters throughout Palestine, including the capital city of Jerusalem.

(a) One of these supporters, a powerful member of the Sanhedrin, may also have been his kin.

(3) In the Jerusalem suburb of Bethany was possibly the home of either his wife or his wife's family; and here on the eve of his triumphal entry into the capital, the aspiring priest-king resided.

(a) Here he established the center for his mystery cult.

(b) Here he augmented his following by performing ritual initiations, including that of his brother-in-law.

[1] A mystery initiation being the meaning behind the 'miracle' of raising Lazarus from the dead.

(4) Such an aspiring priest-king would have generated powerful opposition in certain quarters.

(a) Amongst the Roman administration,

(b) And perhaps amongst the entrenched Judaic interests represented by the Sadducees.

[1] One or both of these interests apparently contrived to thwart his bid for the throne.

[a] But in their attempt to exterminate him they were not as successful as they had hoped to be.

(5) The priest-king had friends in high places.

(a) These friends, working in collusion with a corrupt, easily bribed Roman procurator, appear to have engineered a mock crucifixion, on private grounds, and thus inaccessible to all but a select few.

[1] With the general populace kept at a convenient distance, an execution was then staged.

[a] In which a substitute took the priest-king's place on the cross or in which the priest-king did not actually die.

[2] Toward dusk, further impeded visibility, the 'body' was removed to an opportunely adjacent tomb.

[a] From which, a day or two later, it 'miraculously' disappeared.

2. If Jesus was a legitimate claimant to the throne, it is probable that he was supported, at least initially, by a relatively small percentage of the populace.

a. His immediate family from Galilee, certain members of his own aristocratic social class, and a few strategically placed representatives in Judaea and the capital city of Jerusalem.

(1) Such a following, albeit distinguished, would hardly have been sufficient to ensure the realization of his objectives or the success of his bid for the throne.

(a) In consequence, he would have to recruit a more substantial following from other classes.

[1] Jesus promulgated a message that attempted to do just that.

[a] A message to offer hope to the downtrodden, the afflicted, the disenfranchised, the oppressed.

[b] It was a message with a promise.

[2] There is no evidence that he promulgated this message with cynicism, for he truly acted as though he took his role as priest to the people of Israel as seriously as he did his role as heir-apparent.

[3] His message was ethical and political.

[a] It was directed toward a particular segment of the population in accordance with political considerations.

b. Jesus' message, as it appears in the Gospels, is neither new nor wholly unique.

(1) But if the message, as such, was not entirely original, the means of transmitting it probably was.

(a) Jesus himself was undoubtedly an immensely charismatic individual.

[1] He may well have had an aptitude for healing and other such 'miracles.'

[a] He most certainly possessed a gift for communicating his ideas by means of evocative and vivid parables.

[b] Which did not require any sophisticated training for his audience, and made them accessible, in some sense, to the populace at large.

c. Moreover, unlike his Essene teachers, Jesus was not obliged to confine himself to forecasting the advent of a Messiah.

(1) He could claim to be that Messiah.

(a) And this, quite naturally, imparted greater authority and credibility to his words.

3. It is clear that by the time of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus had recruited a following.

a. But this following seems to have been composed of two quite distinct elements; whose interests were not precisely the same.

(1) On the one hand, there seemed to be a small nucleus of "initiates" - immediate family, other members of the nobility, wealthy

and influential supporters.

(a) Whose primary objective was to see their candidate installed on the throne.

(2) On the other hand, there seems to have been a much larger entourage of 'common people' - the rank and file.

(a) Whose primary objective was to see this message, and the promise it contained, fulfilled.

b. It is important to recognize the distinction between these two factions.

(1) Their political objective - to establish Jesus on the throne - would have been the same.

(a) But their motivations were very different.

E. Christianity after Jesus

1. When the bid to put Jesus on the throne of Palestine failed, the uneasy alliance between the two factions fell apart.

a. The strength of the message that Jesus had used to gain his following had captured the hearts and minds of the followers who were not "insiders" and they fought to keep the hope alive.

(1) Little is said of the followers who backed Jesus in the hopes of garnering power from having helped their friend to the throne but it may well be imagined that they continued to fight for independence from Rome and many may well have perished at Masada.

(a) The first major crisis for the early christians was whether they could afford to be associated with the Jewish peoples, who were becoming increasingly rebellious toward Rome.

[1] It was clear that Rome would have to take action against the rebels.

[a] Against this backdrop the early christians needed to decide whether it was necessary to first be a Jew before becoming a christian.

<1> Saint Paul, always adept at reading the writing on the wall, decided it was not. It was also Paul who decided that the best place to take the new religion was the heart of the empire where there were many oppressed and downtrodden gentiles who, very possibly would be receptive to the message of hope.

2. The new religion was oriented primarily toward a Roman or Romanized audience.

a. Thus the role of Rome in Jesus' death was of course

whitewashed, and guilt was transferred to the Jews.

(1) But this was not the only liberty taken with events to render them palatable to the Roman world.

(a) For the Roman world was accustomed to deifying its rulers, and Caesar had already been officially instated as a god.

[1] In order to compete, Jesus, whom nobody had previously deemed divine, had to be deified as well.

[a] In Paul's hands, he was.

3. Before the message could be successfully disseminated from Palestine to Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, Egypt, Rome and western Europe, the new religion had to be made acceptable to the people of those regions.

a. And it had to be capable of holding its own against already established creeds.

b. The new god needed to be comparable in power, majesty, and in his repertoire of miracles, to those he was intending to displace.

(1) If Jesus were to gain a foothold in the Romanized world of his time, he had to become a full-fledged god.

(a) Not a Messiah in the old sense of the term, not a priest-king, but God Incarnate.

[1] Who, like his Syrian, Phoenician, Egyptian, and classical counterparts, passed through the underworld and the harrowing of Hell, and emerged rejuvenated, with the spring.

[a] It was at this point that the idea of the Resurrection first assumed such critical importance, and for a fairly obvious reason, to place Jesus on a par with Tammuz, Adonis, Attis, Osiris, and all the other dying and resurrected gods who populated both the world and the consciousness of their time.

(b) For precisely this reason the doctrine of the virgin birth was promulgated.

(c) And the Easter festival, the festival of death and resurrection, was made to coincide with the spring rites of other contemporary cults and mystery schools.

4. Given the need to disseminate a god myth, the actual corporeal family of the 'god' and the political and dynastic elements in his history would become superfluous.

a. Fettered as they were to a specific time and place, they would have detracted from his claim to universality.

(1) Thus, to further the claim of universality all political and dynastic elements were rigorously excised from Jesus' biography.

(a) Also all references to Zealots, for example, and Essenes, were also discreetly removed.

b. Such references would have been embarrassing.

(1) It would not have appeared seemly for a god to be involved in a political and dynastic conspiracy. Especially one that failed.

5. In the end nothing was left but what was contained in the Gospels.

a. An account of mythic simplicity, occurring only incidentally in the Roman occupied Palestine of the first century, and primarily in the eternal present of all myth.

END OF LESSON 3